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TheVillage
Issue #230 December 2022/January 2023
Wishing everyone a fantastic Christmas!
NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

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TheVillage Issue 230 Dec 22 / Jan 23

inside

Bringing you village life for almost 25 years

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Front cover: Just a few of the faces and places in *The Village* over the past year.

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MOUNT BATTENHALL

VILLAGE HEROES FROM Alvechurch FC were the star attraction at a special assembly for Alvechurch Crown Meadow First School pupils.

Everyone relived the team's fantastic victory over Cheltenham Town in the FA Cup, cheering the goals on a big screen in the school hall.

Among the many youngsters wearing AFC shirts to support Children in Need day – and lucky enough to be photographed with the team were (above, from left) Hallie Staite, Edie Cartwright, James England and George Deering.

What a fantastic run! Pages 62-63

Our caring villages

Villagers' plans to help people through the winter have started coming to fruition.

Parish councils, churches and other other organisations have been working on ways to make sure no one is left cold or hungry by the energy and cost-of-living crises.

Alvechurch Community Larder will be going ahead as planned following a very successful Village Hall open meeting which led to around 30 volunteers offering their help.

Starting on Friday December 2, the larder is open every Friday from 11am to 12.30pm at Alvechurch Baptist Church. It aims to make available food that would otherwise go to waste, as well as benefiting people in the parish most affected by rising food prices.

The registration fee is £4, with the average value of a "shop" being £20.

An intiative called Warm Spaces in Barnt Green is being co-ordinated by the Bart Green Parish Council with and on behalf of the local community.

VILLAGE band Dirty Brass in action at Rowney Green village hall as they helped to raise around £500 for the Alvechurch Community Larder at a concert organised by residents of Rowney Green.

It offers free tea, coffee, biscuits and chat out of the cold, with wifi, somewhere quiet to work or study and an accessible entrance and toilets.

Warm Spaces are open three times a week during January and February, from Wednesday January 4, 12-2pm at Barnt Green Baptist Church, Bittell Rd; from Thursday January 5, 2-4pm at Quakers Friends Meeting House, Sandhills Lane; and from Friday January 6, 10am-12.30pm at St Andrews Parish Centre, Sandhills Road.

Any volunteers who can spare time to help, contact parish council executive officer Eleanor Choudry on 0121 447 9893 or email exec@barntgreen.org.uk for more details.

■ Alvechurch Baptist Church will be hosting a lunch for carers and those for who they care on January 10. Call 0197 108934 or 0121 447 7369 or email: dlshoesmith@yahoo.co.uk

Village food festival on the 2023 menu

AS BARNT GREEN'S evolution into a foodie destination gathers pace, the parish council is pressing ahead with plans for a food festival next year.

Parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley said the provisional date was September 9, running from 11am until the evening. "We are working on the basis that what the food people will be doing will not be in direct competition with businesses in the village," he told parish councillors

Coun Charlie Hotham added: "What we want is something interesting, not someone doing sausages; for example, cheese, bread, ice cream.

"I think there is a lot of opportunity; we have just got to hope we can get the right number of stalls."

Coun Cholmondeley said they had approached Bromsgrove District Council's new town centres manager and asked her if the district could support the event with matched funding.

■ The parish council is also planning to hold the Community Walk again next year, on June 24, and agreed to hire local band Brass Beatz, who have prevously played free events in the village, to provide entertainment in Millennium Park.

£160,000 Green Belt building fine

AN ALVECHURCH woman has been fined £160,000 after creating stables and a home on Green Belt land in the village without planning permission.

Bromsgrove District Council took Tracie Carter, aged 51, to court after she failed to comply with a planning enforcement notice to remove the structures from her land at the bottom of Aqueduct Lane, Alvechurch.

She had applied for planning permission in 2004 to build six stables but the application was refused

The council said: "It was evident from site visits that Ms Carter had moved into the mobile home and was renting out the stables and equine facilities to a third party."

She was found guilty in her absence and a district judge, "required to have regard to any financial benefit which had accrued or could likely have accrued because of the unlawful development" later fined her £160,000, plus £7,428 costs and victim surcharge at a sentencing hearing at Kidderminster magistrates court.

Coun Charlie Hotham told Alvechurch Parish Council's November meeting: "It might take some time, but Bromsgrove will act."

VILLAGE HALL INSTALLS LIFE-SAVING HELP

PETER Joannides (above) shows the new defibrillator and cabinet in the car park at Hopwood Village Hall, where he is chairman of the management committee.

"It's surprising how many people are not aware of what to do in an emergency – I hope this helps to save a life," he told *The Village*.

Peter said the procedure on finding a casualty is to dial 999 and request an ambulance.

"If the patient has an irregular heart beat after going into a cardiac arrest this is when a defibrillator unit is required," he explained.

"The call centre will advise what to do and explain how to get into the cabinet where a yellow plastic box will speak to you on opening with instructions on how to use the defibrillator.

"The unit will only respond if it finds an irregular heart beat. At all times someone should be doing chest compressions (CPR) until the machine says otherwise."

Follow the link below for guidance on how to use the device:

https://vimeo.com/557677120/e7524918c5

Asset listing

THE FORMER Alvechurch Sports & Social Club, now called The Alvechurch Inn, has been listed on the Register of Assets of Community Value by Bromsgrove District Council.

The nomination was made by Alvechurch Parish Council and it gives the local community a "fair chance to bid to buy on the open market" if the owner decides to sell.

The site had previously been listed in 2014, but this entry had lapsed after five years.

Roadside 'cot'

THE NEW "gates" (above) installed by the county council to mark the entrance to Bordesley look like "half of a child's cot", Coun Rachael Bailes told Alvechurch Parish Council.

Still waiting

NETWORK Rail had failed to respond to Barnt Green Parish Council's request for a report into the status of long-promised lofts for the village station, councillors heard.

Parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley said: "We need something before Christmas. We know it needs ministerial approval, but are there ways to push it through?"

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Parish news

On behalf of all Parish Councillors and Officers, I wish you all a happy and healthy festive season.

Alvechurch Parish Council is committed to supporting its residents and whilst we appreciate that this year may have proved difficult for many, we know that 2023 may do likewise. It is through working together and cooperation that we can help to improve, resolve and support community issues.

We are always keen to hear your views; listed are the links that help you keep in touch.

Cllr Marc Worrall, Chairman

Parish Councillors

Alvechurch Village

Marc Worrall – Chairman
Steve Hornsby – Deputy Chairman
Rachael Bailes
Peter Freeman
Tony Williams
Keith Wiseman

Rowney Green & Bordesley

Tony Wallis

Hopwood

Paul Edwards
Samantha Lewis

APC office

Jayne Smailes
Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer
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Fay Murphy
Assistant Clerk
assistantclerk@alvechurch.gov.uk

Parish Office 1A George Road, Alvechurch B48 7PB
Call us on **0121 447 8016**
Email **clerk@alvechurch.gov.uk**

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/AlvechurchParishCouncil

Villagers light up the streets

ALVECHURCH Parish Council's Christmas tree lights switch-on filled the Village Square on Saturday 3 December.

Villagers who braved the chilly evening were able to warm up with a drink from Gin and Pickles, or a pizza from Get Bak'd.

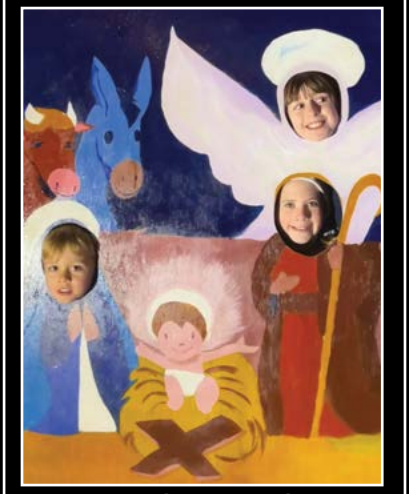
The town crier managed to corral the crowd together to gather for the choirs. Crown Meadow First School Year 4 singers kicked the carols off and performed brilliantly, singing their hearts out – even though a musical mishap, cut out the music.

Alvechurch Community Choir performed some classics, followed by Alvechurch Middle School singers belting out jolly tunes in their Santa hats.

After a countdown, the Christmas Tree was lit. Many villagers then made their way to the Baptist Church, where there was free hot chocolate and mulled wine, crafts (including building a LEGO nativity), and Alvechurch Choir gave a second carol performance.

All smiles ahead of the choir performances.

Leo and Isabelle enjoyed the lights more than their faces show.



A very angelic scene at the Baptist Church.

Crown Meadow choir youngsters getting ready to perform.

Santa greets younger villagers with sweets.

Festive crafts for the whole family at the Baptist Church.

Clockwise from top left: Cooper the spaniel dressed to impress, a reindeer and an elf greet villagers at the Baptist Church, Bromsgrove Town Crier Kevin Ward.

Alvechurch Middle School in song.

A view from above.

Alvechurch Community Choir in action at the Baptist Church.

Festive crafts and community

ALVECHURCH Village Hall's Christmas Craft Fayre was a storming success. The fayre raised a total of £1,240, of which £1,000 will go towards maintenance of the Village Hall and £240 to the charity Papyrus.

A raffle was held with hampers to win (*pictured right*), and there were lots of stalls selling festive gifts including jewellery, stained glass, pencil cases and a very popular cake stall.

The strong sense of community continued as many villagers joined the Remembrance Day moment of silence together.

Fun for all: Raffles and busy stalls.

Merry Christmas from everyone at Barnt Green Parish Council

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Merry Christmas from everyone at Amy Greaves School of Dance

Merry Christmas from the team at Bliss Hair Therapy

Merry Christmas from Independent District Councillor Annette English

Everybody at Hillscourt wishes you a very Merry Christmas

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all customers, from Coopers Hill Farm

Merry Christmas from everyone at The Village including Vinny!

Merry Christmas from Independent Parish & District Councillor Charlie Hotham

Santa, songs and lights

HUNDREDS of villagers braved a cold afternoon to enjoy some pre-Christmas revelling and celebrate the lights switch-on in Barnt Green High Street, organised by Barnt Green Parish Council.

Santa mingled with the crowd handing out sweets to children as the Arrow Valley Brass band played festive favourites and children from The Theatre Workshop Choir filled the air with Christmas song. Everyone counted down to the Santa switch-on and the December sky came to light!

SANTA also called in at Rowney Green on a fantastic sleigh of light - pictures below by *Wendy Easter*.

Pictures by Simon Woolford

Lickey tree lighting: Santa and his elves light gather to light the tree.

Santa hands out gifts in Lickey.

SANTA CLAUS LIGHTS UP LICKEY AND BLACKWELL

FATHER Christmas made an early stop at Blackwell, to join in with Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council's Christmas tree lighting and residents gathered to help Santa switch on the lights.

In Lickey, a packed audience filled the Holy Trinity church to attend another very successful festive Parish Council concert. Parish council chairman Coun Bakul Kumar took the role of MC for the evening and welcomed the return of the Blackwell Concert Band after a few years' absence.

Lickey Hills Primary School Choir was a highlight of the evening, and sung wonderfully, decked out in festive gear. Santa once again dropped into the concert to present the parish council competition prizes, and held a special Christmas quiz with the help of his mini-choir of four. All the children went home with a present and a bar of chocolate.

Once wrapped in hats, scarfs and coats to greet the seasonably chilly night, the congregation gathered to light the now well-established fir tree, with the help of the village children and adults . . . plus a chocolate coin for the empty meter!

Lickey concert: Santa joins the children dressed appropriately.

Children's choir charms the crowd.

Let there be light, in Blackwell!

New member for parish council.

Santa conducts the band.

Charity tree recycling for children

FEE'S TREES, based in Cofton Hackett is, for the fourth year, organising a charity Christmas tree collection and recycling scheme for the Cofton, Barnt Green, Alvechurch, Hopwood and Bromsgrove areas.

The initiative has raised £10,015 over the last four years for Birmingham Children's Hospital (BCH). It raises the money through people making a donation to have their trees taken away after Christmas.

This year, Fee's Trees have once again teamed up with volunteers from LogCo.co and further volunteers this year from Trinity House Group.

In addition to the tree recycling scheme, over the last year, Fee and the team of volunteers have continued to fundraise. They had a stall at Picnic in the Park in Alvechurch in the summer, and organised the first Barnt Green Bike Ride. Fee's son Ewan will also be running the London Marathon in April to further raise money for BCH.

Fee's Trees owner Fiona Edwards (right), who is also an Ambassador for BCH, said: "So many people love a real Christmas tree but don't want the upheaval of moving it in their own car after the big day. By providing this service we can help them save time and mess."

She added: To date we have raised over £72,500 for the hospital in memory of our daughter Emilia through various fundraising events, and the support of the local community over the years has been phenomenal."

This year, the teams of volunteers will be out and about collecting trees on Sunday 8 January 2023.

■ To arrange a collection or to check if your area is included, visit www.justgiving.com/fundraising/bch2023trees or use the QR code (right), make your donation and then email your home address to: bchtreecollection@btinternet.com or text 07941 936668.

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CO-OP FOR THE COMMUNITY

A VILLAGE store presented three local charities and causes with cheques to support them and the work they do.

The money donated is raised by a scheme the Alvechurch Co-operative runs through their members. Each store supports three organisations every year, and one per cent of each Co-op brand purchase made by Co-op members is donated to the cause of their choosing.

The Lounge, Alvechurch Village Hall and Baby Ava's Foundation were the recipients of the cheques this year from the Alvechurch Co-op, located in the Village Square, which will go towards keeping their organisations running and updating equipment. Jan Brice, who sits on the Village Hall Committee said: "We're planning to use this funding for a projector and screen for the hall".

The money received by The Lounge will go towards the seniors provision, and supporting their their Monday group: *Friendship Matters*.

Baby Ava's Foundation were unable to attend the presentation in The Square, however they have received a similar donation from the Co-op.

In total the Co-op in Alvechurch donates more than £5,000 annually to local funds.

All three organisations have been the recipients of donations from the Co-op in the last few years.

Pete Nash, the Membership Pioneer for Alvechurch and Rubery stores was passionate about how the scheme supports the community and can make a difference to causes important to Alvechurch.

You can support your local community by becoming a Co-op member online and through your account choosing one of the causes in Alvechurch to donate your money to, every time you buy Co-op brand goods.

■ **For more information, visit: www.coop.co.uk/membership**

Thumbs up: Members of the Village Hall Committee receive their cheque.

Investing in the community: Sarah and Louise (above left and centre), of The Lounge, with Maxine, Mandy and Pete from Alvechurch Co-op.

Read more about what The Lounge has achieved and run for the community this year, and their plans for 2023 on page 61.

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King's invests in sixth formers

AN exciting new chapter has begun at King's Senior School with the announcement that they will be starting work on phase one of a new Sixth Form Centre for Year 12 and Year 13 during the summer of 2023.

The Sixth Form Centre will be developed with a remodelling of the existing building, "School House", and will see the addition of a plethora of enviable new Sixth Form facilities. With the collaboration of architects *Squires and Brown*, the new Sixth Form Centre will offer a first-class Sixth Form facility in the heart of Worcester City Centre.

The phased development will include individual study spaces, a new café, seminar rooms, IT facilities, improved facilities for Post 18 university and career support and new offices for the Head and Deputy Head of Sixth Form.

Alongside this, the Sixth Form-specific departments such as Economics, Business Studies and Psychology will be relocated.

The investment in the new Sixth Form Centre will sit alongside the redevelopment of the Sixth Form Curriculum by Deputy Head Academic, Katie Beever.

September 2023 will see extended provision in this curriculum, augmenting our exceptional academic provision with an enhanced qualification programme that will assist students as they enter Higher Education and the world of work, helping fulfil our vision for pupils to be curious, caring and confident.

Headmaster, Gareth Doodes said: "This is an exciting time for the growth of the King's Sixth Form. The new Sixth Form centre will offer a much-needed larger space in which students will be able to learn, study, meet, engage with mentors and support staff, and develop the skills required to ensure they have an effective transition into Higher Education and the working world.

Artist's impression: Sixth form centre.

"Alongside the new Sixth Form Centre, an enhanced Sixth Form Curriculum and Sixth Form Programme will create well-rounded, ambitious young adults, who are well equipped to take their next steps, whether into Higher Education, apprenticeships or straight into the world of work."

■ **Join King's at their Open Morning on Saturday 21 January.**
www.ksw.org.uk/shapedbykings

ON THE TRAIL TO FITNESS

ON the border of Birmingham and Worcestershire lies a vast area of woodland and trails that lead from the Lickeys to Waseley, and Clent.

These trails want to be run on, will increase your fitness, and improve your mental health. In the heart of the Lickeys, a UKA trail running coach has created a group of runners that do just this.

Trail Run West Midlands hosts group sessions on Wednesdays at 6.30pm and a trail run on Sunday mornings at 8.30am, with the aim to have a friendly, diverse and welcoming community of trail runners.

"From road, to trail, to fell" is the journey coach Andy Pye and run leader Leah Atherton take you on. Sessions consist of coaching technique, with fun warm-ups and strength and conditioning.

On Wednesdays you can join a High Intensity Interval Training session to increase your running fitness. On Sundays Andy takes you on a journey through the Lickey and Waseley hills, exploring the numerous paths and the best views they have to offer.

From road, to trail, to fell: a trail running group having fun at the Lickeys.

The maximum group size is 15, so everyone has a great coaching experience, and at a cost of only £6 per session is value for money.

Andy offers other coaching services, and you could try the Midlands Tops Round. The sessions are great fun, help you improve, and as a bonus you might even make some new friends while you're at it.

If you are looking for a welcoming group that will confidently take you off road, Trail Run West Midlands is the perfect place.

www.trailrunwestmidlands.co.uk

Education in the Lickey Hills

THE guest speaker at the Lickey Hills Local History Society had the packed Trinity Centre enthralled, *writes Keith Woolford*.

Dawn Hamill, who gave a talk on the "Story of the Midland Adult School Union"(MASU), was part of a family that took advantage of, and ultimately benefited from the scheme.

She was approached in 2016 to make a written record of the union but was encouraged not to make it a "dry" one! Following many interviews with past students and delving into the Birmingham Library archives, Dawn's enthusiasm for her subject was evident.

Old MASU handbooks were on display, as was her book "The Last Class".

The contributions of MASU, which was founded in 1884, have since encouraged social reform, and included mentoring new students .

They were also responsible for giving a generous grant to The Lickey Hills Society, enabling the new Gateway Boards to be produced for the Country Park.

An education: Dawn Hamill with Brian Gough, Chair of The Lickey Hills Local History Society.

An unexpected guest: a rabbit caught against a full moon rising over Bordesley. *Picture*/Alex Nowek

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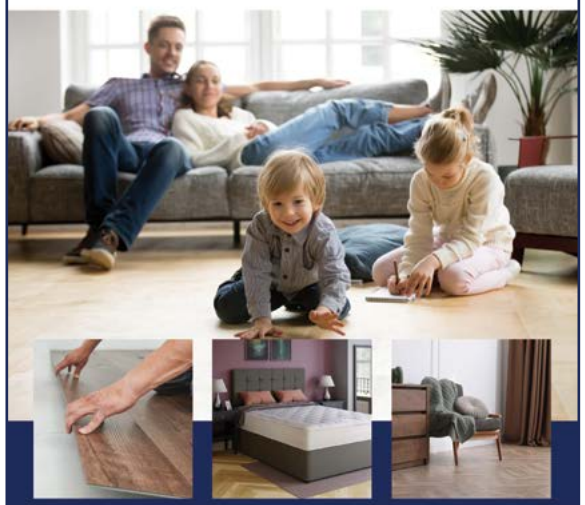

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The Village

VILLAGES REMEMBER OUR FALLEN SOLDIERS

From left: *Chris Lamb, Stu Baker, Brett Shepherd and the Rev Gail Rogers.*

VILLAGERS in Alvechurch gathered on Remembrance Sunday to remember fallen soldiers from across the parish.

A special service was held at St Laurence Church followed by a procession to the Village Green where they were joined by more villagers for a memorial service.

It included a two-minute silence, reading of names by pupils from Crown Meadow First School and Alvechurch Middle School, groups of Brownies and Guides, and wreath-laying by representatives from the community.

Gathering one of its largest crowds to date, the memorial service was coordinated in collaboration with Alvechurch Parish Council and St Laurence Church by Brett Shepherd, who served in the Army in the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment between 1998-2008, and was a Captain when he left.

Brett moved to Alvechurch two years ago and, following the remembrance event in 2021, wanted to bring more service-people and representatives from the community together to commemorate the occasion.

This year, in addition to remembering the people who gave their lives in the First and Second World Wars, the service also remembered those who have died in subsequent wars.

A smaller, informal service was also carried out on the Village Green on 11 November, attended by villagers and groups including village nurseries who gathered together and laid wreaths.

THE Rev Sheri Gidney led a special service at the Holy Trinity Church in Lickey on Remembrance Sunday, followed by a Remembrance service over the road at the Lickey memorial.

Rev Gidney was accompanied by Coun Bakul Kumar, chairman of Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council, who read out the names of the fallen in front of the memorial. A large gathering of people joined to pay their respects on the chilly but bright morning and local Guides, Cubs, Scouts and Beavers groups attended the memorial.

After the service, children asked veterans about their medals and their significance.

Pictures by Keith Woolford

Parking fee madness

Dear Editor – I have lodged my opposition to the proposed car park charges at the three Lickey Hills car parks.

It is madness and will adversely affect the ability for many families to continue to enjoy the amazing facilities there which are, as the consultation document from Birmingham City Council says, heavily used.

A lot of people have to drive there and will stop using the car parks and lose the health benefits of getting out to exercise in a beautiful area of countryside.

They won't even be able to park on the locals roads as restrictions are being introduced at the same time. In addition people who park there to play golf or visit the cafes and hotel are already paying which will make them think twice about using the facilities.

These businesses that serve visitors will lose income which I'm sure will affect their ability to continue trading. So what if the car parks need upkeep? - no one minds a wet or muddy car park when they are going for a walk in the countryside.

In my experience such consultations are generally a done deal and this is a process that they have to go through.

Outraged, Barnt Green

Decision is the pits

Dear Editor – I think it should be noted that Alvechurch Parish Council chairman Marc Worrall used his casting vote to secure the sale of the gravel pit in Rowney Green to one individual, rather than a group of seven villagers, who had come together to buy it for the use of the local community all year round.

To sell it for the sole use of one individual defies all logic when it could be used by everyone, as and when they choose.

We have heard that the money raised is going towards amenities for Alvechurch. I think it's unfair that land that belonged to Rowney Green is sold and the proceeds going to Alvechurch.

It should also be noted that a proposal to buy the pit had been put forward years before by a different villager, who was promised first refusal, but none was given.

Jeni Burton, Rowney Green

Orchard land plan

Dear Editor – Traditional orchards are vanishing from the landscape, with an area the size of the Isle of Wight lost in a century, so as a local response to such loss, a group of Beoley's Portway residents are looking to acquire land in their locality to plant as a community orchard.

Community orchards are booming across the UK, thanks in part to renewed interest in living off the land during Covid-19 lockdowns. Residents in Portway are planning to club together to plant fruit trees on a local green space.

A new generation of orchards are keeping old traditions alive and reviving Britain's "lost" apples.

There will be something magical about having a community orchard in Beoley and we are keen to reap the community and educational benefits of growing, caring for and harvesting their fruits, but also the environmental and wildlife benefits of trees.

Paul Bridgewater
Portway, Beoley

Have your say . . . about anything!

email: editor@villageonline.co.uk
or write to: Letters, The Village, The Limes, Swan Street, Alvechurch B48 7RR

Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication. We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.
The deadline for the next issue is January 5th 2023.

WHERE'S VINNY?

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD Jacob Shield, of Hopwood, a pupil at Crown Meadow First School, Alvechurch, shows off the Mini Vinny he won in November's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village*.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide - as is the Vinny on our bauble!).

Tell us where he's hiding via phone, email or post – see details on bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, especially if leaving a voicemail message, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on January 1 2023. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

Muddy worry: Who is responsible for the upkeep of Lickey park paths?

Muck ponds

Dear Editor –What a shame it is to see the once-lovely Lickey duck ponds fall into such a state.

Silted up and covered in unsightly vegetation, so much so that they don't flow as they should.

Add to this that again tree contractors just churn up the paths leaving them unusable for the majority. Someone must agree the works they undertake, and as such surely they must have the accountability to sign the works off?

A once pleasant walk around the duck ponds is now a trip fraught with hazards, dodging the mud and questioning who is accountable and responsible for their upkeep.

Concerned Resident, Lickey

Where's the care?

Dear Editor – In the last few weeks I have witnessed multiple near-misses in The Square/Bear Hill area of Alvechurch village centre.

This seems to be due to pure carelessness of some drivers. One driver, who was parked across two spaces outside the chemist almost reversed out of his space(s) into a car waiting at the junction, and another who didn't even look while pulling out of Bear Hill and almost went directly into the side of me.

How long until a person is hit?

Worried, Alvechurch

Join the village crew

Mariea Clarke, tells us about the history of the Alvechurch Village Society, and how you can get involved in 2023.

It may be known as the "Summer of Love" but in 1969 Alvechurch was full of agitation . . .

The plans for a new motorway caused outrage. The Alvechurch Village Society was formed to try to protect the village from the encroachment of traffic and the destruction of the natural beauty of the area.

The respectable people of Alvechurch protested, even graffitied!

Their efforts were partially successful; the canal was diverted and eventually Alvechurch got a by-pass. It only took 25 years.

The Village Society hasn't stopped caring for the environment since. Most of its work is in the surrounding countryside with volunteers making fortnightly forays around the parish footpaths (pictured above, right) clearing scrub and mending stiles.

The monthly Sunday walks are open to all and always well attended. Walkers also appreciate the society's set of six illustrated walks. These are available from several businesses, including The Weighbridge, The Lounge and Alvechurch Library.

The Village Society provides a range of talks and activities, mainly in the Village Hall. These have included topics such as the National Garden Scheme, Bletchley Park but also music from local groups, like The Community Choir and Alvechurch Radical String Ensemble, a ukulele band.

Their ever-popular New Year Quiz in January is always a highlight. Proceeds from these events are used to support the Village Hall, The Lounge and other local charities.

They have a large and growing membership, including some founder

members, one of whom is over 100 years of age. Membership is only £10 per year and new members are always welcome.

If you've always wanted to get more involved in village life, or do more to support the community you live in, 2023 might be a great time to join.

■ For more information and how to join, contact Secretary Gerard Nash or Treasurer Martin Clarke: gerardnash1@outlook.com martinclarke1@btinternet.com

On with the hats! (from left) Brian Gould, Carole Burden, Keith Woolford, Baden Carlson, Ranger Steve Hinton, Jill Harvey and Chair of The Lickey Hills Society Mike Brooke take a festive break from work on their next big project.

Following the success of the new gateway boards for the Lickey Hills Country Park this year, the society is working on a double-sided information board based on the golden days of the trams that travelled to Rednal from Birmingham city centre.

The new board is due to be installed early in the new year.

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PILATES CLASSES LED BY A QUALIFIED PHYSIOTHERAPIST
New classes in Alvechurch Village Hall, starting Monday 9 January.
11:45am: Seated rehab pilates for those with long term health conditions, or difficulty attending a floor based session. Exercises can be modified to suit any need
12:45pm: Mixed ability pilates class- beginners welcome
Monday evening classes in Barnt Green Baptist Church
7pm Mixed ability class | 8pm Intermediates class
1:1 Pilates assessment and exercise sessions also available on request.

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PARTY, RECOVER, REPEAT

WELL, that's it . . . Christmas is here! The coming weeks are likely to be filled with parties, celebrations and cheer.

They will probably contain a fair amount of snacks, buffets and drinks as well. The perfect way to unwind and celebrate the end of yet another pretty tumultuous year in England . . . but perhaps not so perfect for your skin?

All of the sugary foods and alcohol can have a negative impact on our skin (and possibly weight too), so it's important to remember to look after yourself.

That means trying your best not to pass out in your makeup after a long night, and drinking as much water as possible to make sure you (and your skin) stay hydrated - even though a glass of prosecco or a pint of beer might be more appealing.

As always, except for those who have to work, the strange week between Christmas and new year for many consist of not much at all, relaxing and making plans for the new year.

We all know that with the new year, also come the resolutions, many of which involve fitness, health and changes which can make a positive difference to our lives . . . whether that's to cut down on alcohol, take better care of your nails or even committing to regular "brain training exercises".

For those looking to find something new to get the body moving - and as you may have already read in this issue of *The Village* - there are plenty of groups such as trail running, cycling, walking, dance and many more available to try. Some of which may offer taster or "pay as you go" sessions for you to have the opportunity to test before you commit.

Time to unwind: Relax in a treatment room at Lunatips, Cofton Hackett.

If you find that your skin has suffered over the festive period (and what better time of year to indulge in chocolate and cheese?) a facial could help rejuvenate your skin, and make it appear brighter ready for 2023.

Christmas is one of the beauty industry's busiest times of year (along with the lead-up to people's summer holidays etc.), and while you might find some businesses have a limited amount of space for you to take advantage of in the run-up to Christmas, you might find the new year is also quite busy, as people commit to starting the new year with a fresh face or trim.

Christmas and new year of course can be a difficult time for many, and there is support available for those who need it, including those businesses you can find in *The Village*. Some of the businesses on these pages will be able to provide practical help with a variety of mental health and wellbeing issues, from depression and anxiety to chronic illness management and support with women's health.

It's not necessarily always a time for change, but if you have considered asking for help, then the start of a new year seems like a pretty good time to do it.

The Village will be back in February, but for now, Merry Christmas!

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BINDIS, BHAJIS AND BOLLYWOOD DANCING

Burcot Grange and The Lodge celebrate Diwali with a day dedicated to learning more about Indian culture and enjoying traditional food, clothes, dancing and much more.

STAFF and residents at local care home Burcot Grange and The Lodge celebrated the Hindu festival of Diwali yesterday with a fun-filled day of Indian culture.

Diwali, or the Festival of Lights, is one of the most important religious festivals in Hinduism. To mark the start of the five-day festival, staff and residents at the home wore saris and traditional Indian decorative jewellery, ate Indian food and enjoyed a Bollywood dancing class.

The dance class was led by Reena Tailor, Artistic Director of Bollywood Dreams Dance Company and her team of school-age volunteers. After enjoying a series of performances put on by Reena and her team, residents and staff were invited to take part.

Residents were also invited to wear a range of traditional Indian saris in a wide variety of colours as well as crystal bindis, a traditional form of Indian decoration worn in the centre of the forehead.

"Celebrations like this really help to bring a sense of energy into the home."

The celebrations were complemented by fresh, handmade, traditional Indian food by Burcot Grange's own in-house team of specialist chefs. Staff, residents, and their families were able to enjoy hand-made onion bhajis, samosas, as well as a selection of Indian sweets.

The celebration marks only the second event to have taken place at the home since the pandemic and comes thanks to the progressive easing of social distancing restrictions by new owners Berkley Care Group to bring them into line with Government guidelines. Described as "the new normal", the guidelines mean that families of residents at the home no longer need to make appointments to visit their relatives and can once again participate in activities and events at the home.

Having a go: Residents tried their hands at Bollywood dancing.

Commenting on the event, Vicky Osborne, General Manager of Burcot Grange and The Lodge, said: "It's been a tremendous event for both for residents and staff to enjoy. Celebrations like this really help to bring a sense of energy into the home, which is clear to see not just on residents' faces but also on those of the caring staff.

"I can't thank Reena and her student-volunteers enough. They were great with the residents showing them different Bollywood dancing techniques.

Volunteers: Showcased their brilliant Bollywood dancing.

New experiences: Residents wore Indian bindis.

"I'm also grateful to our team of expert chefs who went to great lengths to reproduce these fabulous Indian recipes. The food was delicious and allowed the residents to learn more about Indian cuisine and culture."

Also commenting, Reena Tailor, Artistic Director from Bollywood Dreams Dance Company, said: "It was so nice for us to be able to spend the day with the residents. My team really enjoyed teaching them about Bollywood Dancing, Indian culture, and to offer them an experience they may not have had before."

SCARECROW HAY-DAY

Monsters, children's characters, celebrities and more . . . Alvechurch excelled in creativity this year, and adorned the streets with Halloween figures.

Pictures by Dennis Brown, of Hopwood.

EVEN with a very wet start – and lots of straw! – the third Alvechurch Scarecrow Festival brought a host of fantastic figures to the village.

Scarecrows began to appear early on the first morning as the rain eased and more and more seemed to spring up by the hour.

Although the weather proved wet and chilly throughout the week, this didn't appear to deter visitors either. Across half term, families and groups young and old could be seen wandering around the village, maps in hand, admiring the displays.

This year, the festival raised £2,233 for The Lounge through ticket sales and entry fees. Local businesses donated vouchers and prizes for the winners of the various scarecrow categories.

The top prize for best overall scarecrow was judged by members of the Alvechurch Scarecrow Festival Facebook group, who "liked" photos of their favourites.

This year it went to Vicky Carroll and family, with 141 votes for their entry of *The Gingerbread Man,* pictured right.

Festival organiser Megan Clayton said, of the event: "The biggest thanks to everyone who made a scarecrow. I am so incredibly grateful for those who go out of their way to make the scarecrow trail possible.

"Thank you to everyone who bought a map, food/drink or raffle tickets. Also a huge thank you to all the businesses who generously donated prizes for our scarecrow winners!

"As always thanks to The Lounge and the volunteers for their support and making this year's festival run so smoothly."

Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council News

Newsletter Winter 2022/23

A Proud Moment

Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council (LBPC) has been awarded "Foundation Status" in the Local Award Scheme by National Association of Local Councils (NALC). This award means that council has met the standards set by the sector, assessed by peers, and put in place the conditions for continued improvement.

Cllr Bakul Kumar, Chair of the Parish Council said he was delighted that NALC has recognised the work carried out by our councillors and Executive Officer in providing high quality of support to the community, sharing best practice and good governance.

Parking Charges

LBPC has been in contact with the planning department of Birmingham City Council (BCC), expressing their disappointment that it is in the process of charging to park in Lickey Hills Parks.

An online and face-to-face consultation has been asking the residents about what to charge and the impact of displacement parking. BCC promotes a healthier lifestyle and wellbeing and encourages the residents to go outdoors, walk and enjoy parks.

We have responded to the consultation expressing our concerns that charging low-income families will be counterproductive as they may stop travelling or park in undesignated areas. We are concerned that people who do not want to pay will park on nearby roads and cause disruption.

Calendar Winners

A HUGE thank you to all who entered our calendar photograph competition – it was so difficult to choose the top 12.

The winners are Andrew Kibble, Scott Bennett, Mary Clarke, Lesley Stanhope, Sue Hughes, Tom Falconer and Carrie Perkins. Calendars are on their way to you soon.

Pictured: June (above, right) by Andrew Kibble; and August (right) by Tom Falconer.

■ We are yet again looking at various avenues to tackle the problem of inconsiderate parking during school times on Old Birmingham Road and Lickey Square.

Christmas in the Parish

Thank you to everyone who attended our tree lighting ceremonies and Christmas event in Lickey Church.

Well done to all of the children who entered the Christmas card competition, our prize winners and to the wonderful choir from Lickey School. Well done especially to card design winner Sophie Field, of Lickey School, whose entry is pictured above, right.

We would also like to let Santa know that his participation is always very much appreciated!

Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council would like to wish all of our residents, contractors and colleagues a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Hunters Hill

We have written to Birmingham City Council to find out more about the future and current use of the site. Any concerned residents are urged to contact us or County Councillor Kit Taylor who is looking for information on how the use of the site is impacting the local community.

Contact Us

Lisa Winterbourn, our executive officer, may be contacted on: eo@lickeyandblackwellpc.org or: 07930 837770. Much more council information may be found at: www.lickeyandblackwellpc.org or facebook.com/lickeyandblackwellcouncil

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20 Years Ago

From The Village archive

THE COVER of our December 2002/January 2003 issue featured a stained glass window titled "Christ Blessing Children" found at Trinity Methodist Memorial Church, Blackwell. Stained-glass makers Jim Scanlon and Rob Paddock, of Midland firm *The Art of Glass* discussed their plans to transform a former village church in Blackwell into their main studio, full of beautiful new and existing pieces of stained glass.

MARLBROOK GOLF COURSE

We met the men hoping to turn Marlbrook Tip into a new golf course. Dudley- based Liberty Construction company, run by Eddy McIntosh and his son John, had bought the festering tip for £1 and were investigating an application to cap the tip and turn it into a golf course,.

"If we do what we want to do, in ten years' time this will not be known as Marlbrook Tip, it will be Marlbrook Golf Course".

THE PATHFINDER

Forest Hansen, retired professor of philosophy, former Alvechurch Village Society secretary and American abroad spoke to Liz Dove about his efforts to make our rural walkways a pleasure to use. Forest led a small and committed band of volunteers in keeping the footpaths of Alvechurch parish neat and tidy, mending stiles, cutting back the overgrowth and installing way-markers (among many more other tasks). The role was hard work, particularly over the summer, Forest and his wife Val hadn't had a summer holiday in seven years due to the commitment. In the article he spoke about how it was time to give up the role he had long undertaken with gusto, and was on the hunt for someone to lead the "Thursday footpath crew".

10 Years Ago

From The Village archive

THE COVER of our December 2012/January 2013 had by now become the iconic cover you might recognise today, featuring a round up of faces from the magazine throughout the year. Although if anyone knows why there was a koala on the cover of the December 2012 issue, you have a better memory than us.

MEMORIES IN A DISTANT COUNTRY

The Remembrance service in Rowney Green in 2012 was particularly poignant as relatives of a Canadian airman killed in the 1943 bomber crash near Rowney Green attended the memorial service. Sergeant Alton O'Neil was a Rear Gunner based at RAF Pershore during WWII and died on November 9, 1943 when Wellington Bomber X3932 crashed at 7.49pm on its way back to RAF Pershore from a routine training exercise. Alton's nephew, Charles Baker and his wife Caroline, flew in specially from Ontario, Canada for the service.

'CHURCH LOOKING UP

Much like in 2022, there was lots of excitement about Alvechurch FC in 2012, Alex Young reported, as big changes hit the club with a new CEO and Manager. The team had played three great games, winning against Leamington (3-1), Loughborough University (1-0) and drawing with Bridgnorth Town (2-2). At the time The Village was going to press, Church were looking forward to an epic clash with Wolverhampton Wanderers in the Birmingham Senior Cup.

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Meet the team

Martin Pryor
Financial Planner & Adviser
Business & Finance degree to Graduate training course at Prudential, leading to becoming a qualified independent financial adviser and setting up PPM Financial Planning in 2006.

Laura Daniels
Mortgage Adviser
Laura joined in 2016, providing admin support whilst completing training to become our qualified mortgage broker.

Nicky Lowndes
General Manager
Nicky Joined PPM Financial Planning at the very beginning in 2006 bringing with her 19 years of banking experience with HSBC.

Laura Siddall
Financial Adviser
Laura has 19 years of industry experience. Laura's role is to construct financial plans for clients using our cash flow modelling software, helping deliver true financial planning.

Louise Wheeler
Paraplanner
Louise Joined PPM in September 2021, bringing with her 8 years of paraplanning experience and 13 years working within financial services.

INVESTING FOR FREEDOM . . . AND A LONGER LIFE!

IT might not seem to be quite the right time to be diving into the stock market, unless you listen to Warren Buffet who wisely observes to "be fearful when everyone is being greedy but be greedy when everyone is fearful".

Whether you start now or in six months, if you want to live well over the long term, you can't just keep your money in savings accounts . . . do so and it will be constantly eroded by inflation (and taxes). Only by making your money work harder can you have a hope of securing your financial freedom.

The income from your job is not enough in the long term. It may go up over time as you become more skilled, but to keep it coming in you have to continue working, and that means your time is not your own.

It doesn't matter how much you have invested in your skills and how good and valued an employee you may be – when you leave or are asked to leave your job, your income will disappear.

You may manage to have a certain amount of control over your work, but the real decisions such as where you would like to live, what time you want to get up in the morning, how you would really like to spend your Friday afternoons, and so on, are not yours to make.

They remain firmly in the hands of your employer and of the market as a whole. In fact, so does your whole future – from whether you'll be able to make next month's mortgage payment to which week in August you'll be able go on holiday next year.

If, however you own assets and those assets produce an income for you (as real assets should), this changes: the more non-salaried

Cash isn't king if you want to beat inflation and tax, advises Martin Pryor.

income you have the more of your own time you will own.

Real wealth is not about income but about your assets – about the degree to which you can live without depending on the world of work.

See all those employees driving around in expensive cars? Could they keep them if they stopped working and the cash stopped coming in as income? Unlikely.

That means that they don't own that lifestyle, they're simply swapping short-term income for it – renting it, if you like. They can't leave; they don't have enough money to leave their jobs whenever they want and maintain their lifestyles. Invest properly and one day you might have.

The more control you have over your life the better it will be and, importantly, the longer you will live.

A study of civil servants in 1997 found that the higher up the tree people climbed the less likely they were to die of coronary heart disease: more control meant less stress and a longer life expectancy.

This is one of the main reasons why the rich live longer than the poor.

This does not mean that everyone should immediately pile into the market. You need to pay off your debts first – interest bills are likely to make you poorer faster than markets can make you richer. Then you need to be sure that you have six months' worth of cash in a deposit account so that you know you have some short-term freedom (you can leave a job you really hate without worrying too much, and deal with the occasional crisis).

Right now, you might want to have even more than that in cash (these are uncertain times), but in general note that while keeping money in savings accounts stops you getting poorer, it's hard to make you richer. For that you usually have to invest.

If you would like to know more and plot your route to financial freedom then make contact and we can set up a no-obligation initial meeting where we will explain our process and how to approach financial planning.

We tackle the most important question of "How much is Enough?" If you don't have enough we will hatch a plan to help get you "Enough". If you have just "Enough" then we will help you make sure you continue to make good decisions so that this does not change . . . and if you have more than "Enough" we will help you to realise this, and encourage you to spend more . . . after all, we only live once!

Martin Pryor
Lifestyle Financial Planner

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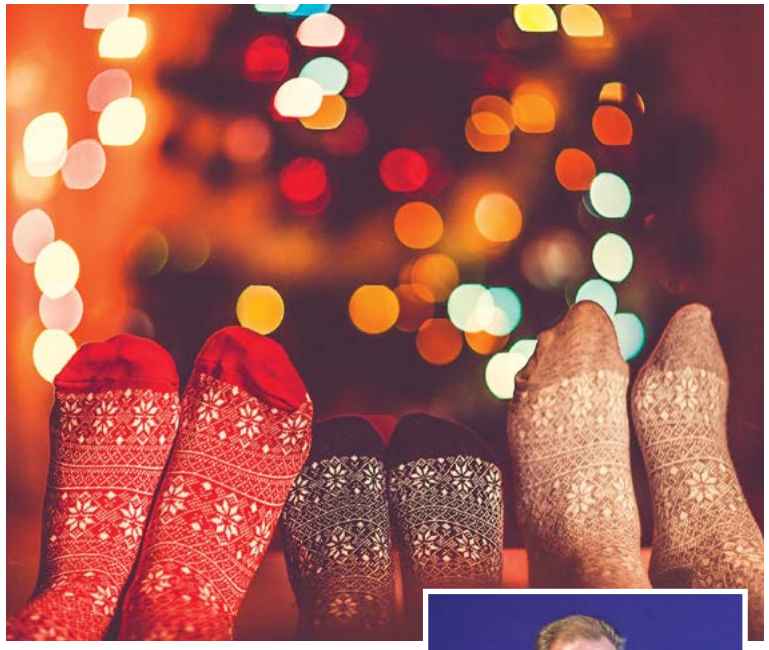
The Value of your investments can go down as well as up and you may not get back the full amount you invested. You should seek independent financial advice if you are unsure of the right decision for your circumstances.

Why using a mortgage adviser is a great idea

We get some great feedback from our existing clients on the service we provide and also often get asked by new potential clients, what are the advantages of using a mortgage broker?

Whether you are looking at residential, buy to let, equity release or commercial mortgages, we can help in the following ways:

- As brokers we have to pass exams and authorisations to get qualified; this allows us to be able to give high-quality advice to clients. Whether your needs are relatively straight forward or you have more complex requirements, our training and expertise can help you to find the right deal for you.
- We also save you time by accessing a wide range of lenders and mortgage deals, some of which are not available to the general public. If you approach lenders directly you have to go through a new detailed and time-consuming process each time.
- If you use the internet to research the best deal, you are probably only using an on-line broker anyway. As your local broker, we offer a dedicated and more personal service on your doorstep.
- We take the strain out of the mortgage process - we stay up to date with the lender and liaise with both your estate agent and legal representatives to ensure the process is as smooth as possible for you.



Mark Meads (right), ready to provide his expert service while you put your feet up over the festive period.

- When you become our client, we not only look after your immediate lending needs, we also contact you in advance of any mortgage deal changes, to ensure you are getting the right advice and best deal for your individual needs. With the recent interest rate changes, this has never been more important.
- Most of all we are a local broker who you can trust.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish all our existing and future clients a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

If you would like an initial free consultation, to see how we may be able to help, please feel free to make a mortgage appointment by calling 0121 445 1227 or by emailing: info@villagefinancial.co.uk

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A BUSY CHRISTMAS SKY

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

DECEMBER and that most exciting of events; the Winter Solstice, when we see the shortest daylight hours and the Sun starts to rise a little earlier and set a little later. Actually, due to the quirks of the Earth's elliptical orbit, the earliest sunset is on the 13th and the latest sunrise is on the 30th.

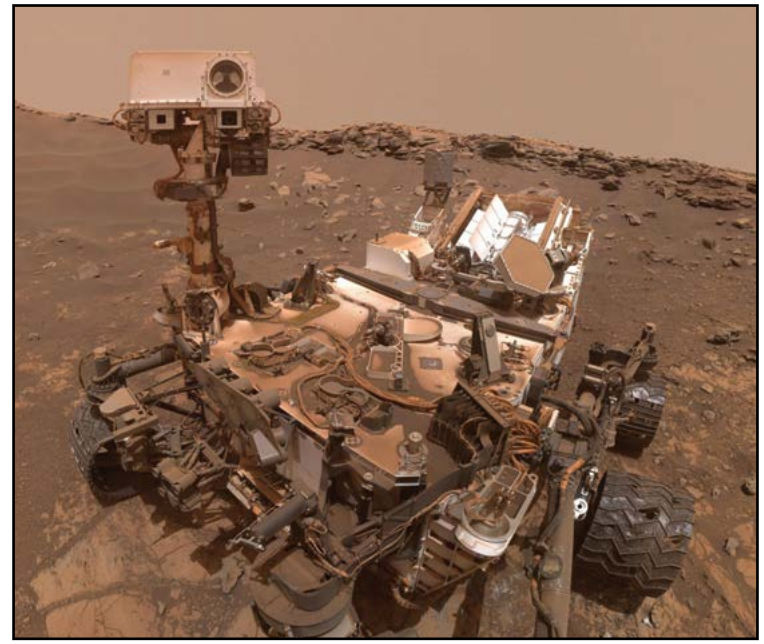
In our evening skies, as soon as it gets dark, Saturn is visible exactly due south at the start of the month. It's only as bright as an average star but do look out for it as it will start to disappear from our evening skies during January. Look out for it on December 26, when it is just above the Moon.

Further left and a little higher is the largest planet in our Solar System, Jupiter. This is the brightest object in the skies now, after the Moon and really dominates the sky all month and into next year as it wanders deeper into the constellation of Pisces.

Later in the evening, further left than Jupiter, we start to see the Pleiades or Seven Sisters and just to the left of them is our third bright planet of the evening, Mars. The red planet is really bright now, although never reaching the dominance of Jupiter, it is unmistakable with its orange hue.

It's at its brightest this month because it reaches opposition on the 8 December. This is when the Sun, Earth and Mars form a straight line and it is almost at its closest to us.

The subject of countless science fiction stories and the origin of invading aliens, it is nowadays also the subject of a lot of real science. There have been no fewer than six rovers sent to Mars and three are still operational and one even has a mini helicopter with it. The oldest one still working is *Curiosity* and it recently celebrated its tenth anniversary on the surface. In that time it has travelled just over 17 miles, so it moves at a similar speed to a motorhome.



***Curiosity*'s selfie: The rover *Curiosity* recently celebrated ten years on the surface of Mars.** *Pictures courtesy of NASA.*

Now as the Moon orbits the Earth, it appears close to each of the planets once a (Lunar) month. For instance, it slides past Jupiter between the 1 and 2 December.

Occasionally it actually lines up with and so passes in front of a planet, called an occultation, and this happens to Mars on 8 December. Unfortunately, it occurs at three minutes to five in the morning.

So, early risers wanting to witness this rare event need to be looking for half an hour or so before this time to spot Mars and give your vision chance to adapt to looking at a very bright Moon and not so bright planet.

It'll be due west and a comfortable height in the sky but tricky to photograph because of the huge difference in brightness. It will take just one hour for Mars to pop out again on the other side and that will be that for a few hundred years.

***Orion* returns: back from its orbit of the Moon.**

December will see the return of the *Orion* spacecraft from its orbit of the Moon. Very exciting to see to a vehicle capable of carrying people to the Moon exactly fifty years after the last man to walk on its surface left.

Oh, by the way, I know the solstice isn't the most exciting event in December, so have a very happy Christmas and a wonderful New Year.

A GREAT STRESS-BUSTER

Dave Morgan, county organiser for the National Garden Scheme, Worcestershire, tells *The Village* about plans for 2023 and how exploring gardens can bring a more calm and peaceful life.

IF you are anything like me you will be fed up with all the continual news bulletins about the cost of living, the increase in fuel costs, climate change, the war in Ukraine and all the other news items that seem to spread gloom and doom. It's as if the media can't be bothered to report good news but would rather promote the stories that will make us all sigh with despair and create more stress in life.

Well I've got some good news – visiting gardens can be a great stress buster! Even more so when you realise that the small admission fee we pay to visit gardens open for the National Garden Scheme raises money for such charities as Macmillan's Nurses, Help the Hospices, Marie Curie and Parkinson's UK. So by visiting an NGS garden and relieving any stress we might feel, we are also helping to support those who are often worse off than we are.

Last year the NGS managed to raise enough money to distribute over £3million to those and other charities, nearly all from the few pounds handed in at garden gates across England and Wales.

In 2023 we have several fabulous gardens open in this local vicinity including number 2 Brookwood Drive, Barnt Green; a multi-themed mature garden with water features, colourful borders, a formal white garden, a wildlife pond and a cutting garden surrounded by large rhododendrons which give a colourful display in late spring. Owners Mike and Liz Finlay opened this garden for the first time in 2022 and it became very popular.

Mike and Liz's garden will be open on 21 May and again on 9 July, but if you can't wait until then you can contact them for a private visit from mid April as long as there are between 6 and 12 of you. And what makes this an even better stress buster is that they offer splendid tea and cakes which you can partake in whilst enjoying the garden splendour. There should even be some plants for sale!

Visit in 2023: 40 allotments on Old Rectory Lane, Alvechurch, to explore.

Meanwhile, if you like variety in your gardens you'll struggle to better the group of gardens open in Alvechurch over the weekend of 17-18 June. Here there will be 11 gardens on show within the village of Alvechurch for a mere £6 combined entrance fee – that's less than 60p per garden!

In Alvechurch there is everything from the newly created gardens surrounding the award winning Wychwood House, completed in 2018, to 5½ acres of garden on the historic site of what was once the Bishop of Worcester's summer palace including the remains of the original moat; and from the formal riverside, secret and courtyard gardens at Rectory Cottage in Old Rectory Lane to the more unconventional garden of Corner House in Latimer Road, which boasts no straight paths or formal borders but mainly a garden packed with native grasses, cottage garden plants and wildflowers to offer shelter and food for pollinating insects and wildlife.

There will even be a 40 plot allotment site in Old Rectory Lane open over that weekend. So something for everyone!

There are large stress-busting gardens open locally, like Morton Hall Gardens in Holberrow Green, near Redditch, which is a garden on top of an escarpment with breathtaking views, and surrounding a Georgian country house (where you need to book in advance through their own website); to our own Oak Tree House – a much smaller garden in Marlbrook, stacked full of plants, where you can just turn up when open in early May, and you even get access to the garden next door as well.

There are NGS gardens open days from early Spring (the earliest is Warndon Court near Worcester on 19 February) right up to the first week in October. In fact some of the garden owners who open for privately arranged visits open nearly all of the year, so you can visit a stress busting garden almost every month of the year. I can't wait to visit some of these fabulous gardens and enjoy not just the gardens themselves but get some ideas for our own, whilst enjoying a coffee and a piece of home made cake. A great way to get rid of stress!

Brookwood Drive: Open in 2023 with a white garden.

The grand opening: Martin and Janet Wright welcome visitors to Alvechurch Open Gardens in 2021.

Oak Tree House: A beautiful, colourful garden to visit in 2023.

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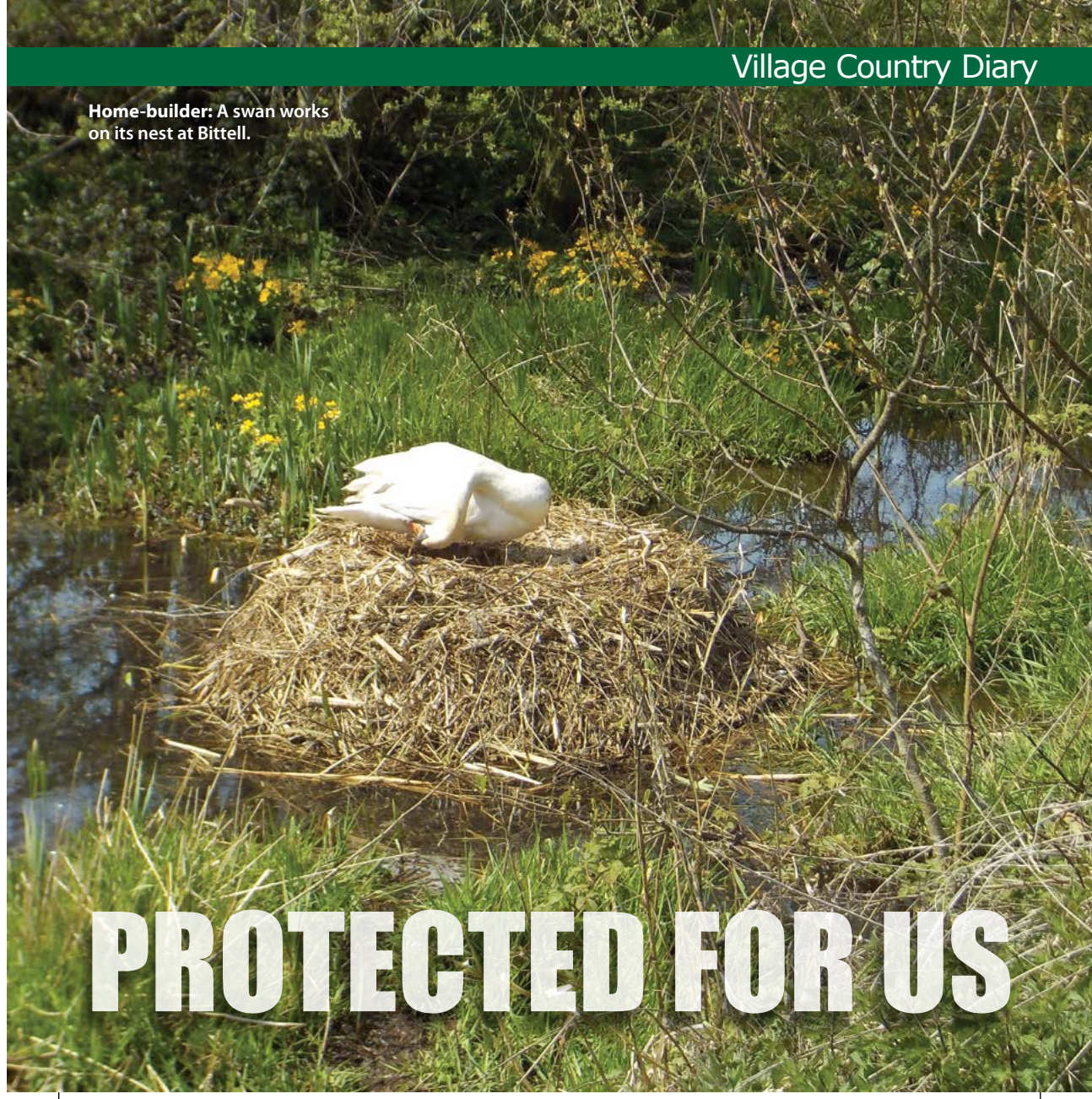

Home-builder: A swan works on its nest at Bittell.

PROTECTED FOR US

Mary Green explores the protected areas around us, conserving the homes of local plants and animals.

WARMTH in October is not new: there was traditionally a mild spell around 18 October called St Luke's Little Summer. But having such high temperature all month and into November as we did this year is odd, typical of this over-heated year. The period of leaf colour change had been very long: in November we still had some oaks all green. I had wild strawberries in flower. By the time you read this things may be a bit more seasonal, and we've certainly had some autumn storms. The heavy rain with the warmth led to spectacular fungi coming up. I noticed them in the front lawns in Alvechurch where I know there is ancient turf with meadow flowers, showing that there is great fungal life underground there too. People who like tidy lawns may not like the flowers and fungi, but they are part of our planet's diversity that we should be pleased to have.

Last month I wrote about the canal as a special

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wildlife site. If I walk up this slightly protected canal for a couple of miles, I get to Bittell reservoirs. This area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which has much more protection and support. (Even SSSIs can be over-ridden, but usually only after government intervention for major infrastructure projects – or in some enterprise zones). It's the shoreline habitat that is especially protected, including some rare plants, though the waters themselves are too, and the vegetation around the reservoirs. Barnt Green Waters, the organisation that manages the estate, is a combination of the sailing and angling clubs, but the Canal and Rivers Trust are also responsible for the land and waters. They have all made a public commitment to biodiversity and draw funding and support for this from Nature England, DEFRA and the Environment Agency.

Most of the estate is closed to the public though there are footpaths, lanes and towpaths nearby to view from. You can follow a track from Bittell Farm to the dam on the upper reservoir, down from there alongside Mill Shrub to the Barnt Green Road, the North Worcestershire Way across the top end of Upper Bittell, a road across Lower Bittell, and the canal towpath – often with tantalising glimpses of the waters and vegetation. There used to be bee orchids visible, but their patch has not been managed right and they have disappeared.

I have recently joined the Friends of Bittell Waters so I can walk in the private places now. It's very encouraging what they're doing here. The land around the reservoirs is a mixture of woodland and more open vegetation. Much of it is managed by having longhorn cattle graze it (the same longhorns from the farm at Withybed I wrote about last month, out on contract work!) They graze some of the understory, break up the ground a bit to encourage seeding plants, and help get rid of alien species like Indian balsam. One or two areas are even managed like hay meadows, with an annual cut and winter grazing.

In some places the woods are now being managed by thinning the trees to allow more open woodland. Some of the soft vegetation round the reservoirs is mown for access, but they are deliberately leaving patches of so-called scrub and longer flowery grassland, because it is such a good habitat.

The waters themselves range from the main reservoirs (Lower Bittell, Mill Shrub and Upper Bittell) to the ponds, Jacob's Cut, old drainage channels, the canal and the young river Arrow. There has been bad water quality, but it is improving and there are far more species in the water than before – plant and animal. They are tackling pollution, difficult as they don't control all the land around. This improvement should impact on the river and canal too. They still suffer from blue-green algae, an invasive species which likes waters with high chemical pollution, but are trialling methods of getting rid of it.

They are also creating new ponds by Upper Bittell. One will create a new wetland habitat near a quiet corner of the lake, the other is within the boundary of the lake so that when the water level drops in dry spells there will still be a pond there supporting wildlife.

All this water and vegetation is excellent habitat for creatures from invertebrates and insects to mammals and especially birds. Herons breed here. I had always wondered where the ones along the canal nested. In recent years egrets have become established. These white birds, similar to but smaller than herons, have only re-established themselves in this country during my lifetime. There are cormorants and two kinds of grebes. The great crested grebes can be seen from the roads and paths, especially in spring when they have their beautiful courtship ritual. The little grebe or dabchick is here too but harder to spot.

Many of us have seen the swans which regularly nest on the Arrow ponds as they are near a road. Once they leave the nest, they can usually be glimpsed on quieter Mill Shrub.

In the reed beds are both reed warblers and reed buntings. These are visitors but breed here. Reed warblers are one of the host species for cuckoos, which I have heard here in spring, though not so often these days. Among the mammals are otters in the water and deer around the woodland. The waters are especially important for insects, many of which spend part of their lives in water. This means that it's also a great place for bats. Not only the common pipistrelles are found here but species like Daubenton's bat which specialises in catching insects over water.

Core funding for Bittell Waters is from the angling and sailing, so their needs have to be balanced with biodiversity. An example is that the lakes are stocked with fish that wouldn't normally be here, and they have a licence to shoot some cormorants in case they take too many fish.

Even if you don't see the richness of species round these waters from the roads and paths, they spread down the river and canal from these breeding grounds, so the influence of this habitat locally is great.

There are lots of other nature reserves near us, some private but many owned by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust or Woodland Trust,

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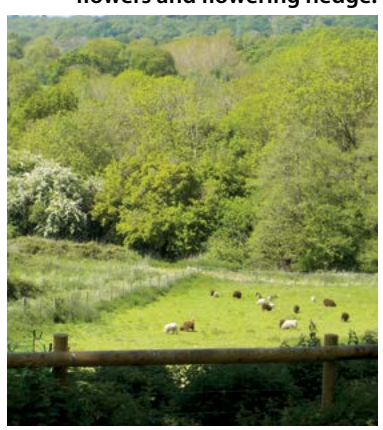
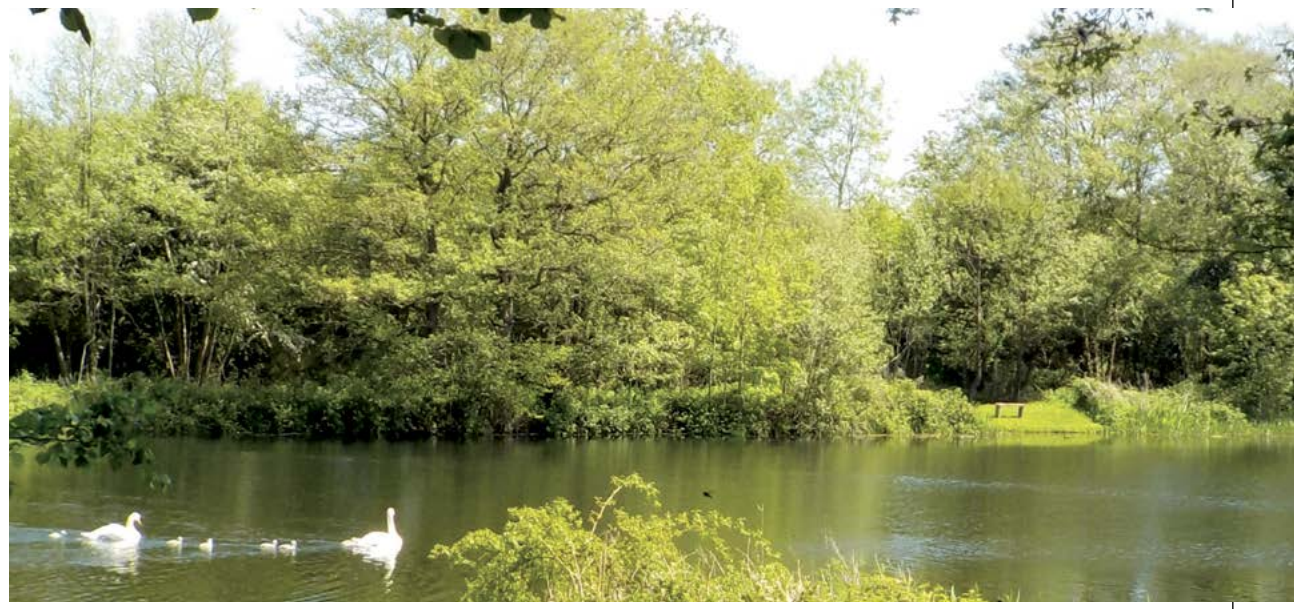
Spot them on your lawn: Fungi found around Alvechurch.

Beauty at Upper Bittell: Meadow flowers and flowering hedge.

Swimming along: A coot glides along the water at Upper Bittell.



Managing the vegetation: Cows grazing at Upper Bittell.



A bevy of swans: Two adults and cygnets take a swim across Mill Shrub.

Bee orchard: At Upper Bittell.

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mostly dependent on volunteers for maintenance. They include ancient woodland at Grovely Dingle (not open to the public), Peck Wood (occasionally open), Beaconwood & Winsel, Broadmoor Wood, parts of Newbourne Wood (which still had nightingales in 1971), Pinfields Wood, Piper's Hill and Pepper Wood (all open). These are remnants of ancient forest or of the medieval Alvechurch Park hunting ground. Penorchard Meadows are ancient pasture, and of course Eades meadow is one of the most famous old hay meadows, both with footpaths open. On the Lickey Hills (a Country Park belonging to Birmingham) there's a different kind of ecosystem on more acid soil, with bilberries and heather, lizards and adders.

The nature reserve behind Hopwood Park service station is a bit of a mystery, as no-one seems to know who's responsible for it! It has clever reed and willow beds which filter out pollution from the service station. It is half-open, half-wooded countryside of the kind people call "scrub", with some big old trees. This is really valuable habitat, typical of this part of England though not valued these days as it has "nothing special" in it. It's an example of the kind of nature reserve which results from just leaving nature alone.

However, it will need some looking after in the future to maintain its openness. It could do with those longhorn cattle! Though it's private, there is a public footpath through, which is maintained and interesting to walk, from near the service station or the playing fields at Hopwood.

We are surrounded by protected land, which should be unnecessary. All land and its wildlife should be looked after as well as or better than these areas are.

■ The Alvechurch scarecrows were lovely again this year. Last year they reappeared in the Baptist Church as Christmas tableaus, and this is one of the poems I wrote about them at the time. Happy Christmas to you all.

Mysterious nature reserve: Found behind the Hopwood service station.

The night before scarecrow

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the church
Scarecrows stood, sat, lay down or roosted on perch
The people had gone and the night fallen still
Over scarecrows created by good Alvechurch skill.
As the bells rang for midnight a stirring began
And a shiver of movement around the church ran.
The owl on the stable beam hooted his call
The sheep shook their wool out and bleats filled the hall.
Joseph looked all around him, with a puzzled frown
He had been Sherlock Holmes last time he looked around.
And Agatha stepped from among the wise men
And danced with such vigour the ground shook again
The angels joined in with wonky wings spread
Till a choir of song grew around the straw bed
The whole church was dancing and singing as one
With joy for the morning of Christmas had come.

Outside in the dark a young man lay down
In the blankets that someone left stacked on the ground
And wished himself scarecrow to lie in the warm
And dance as the clock chimed before Christmas morn.
The scarecrows froze silent, their feet once more still
As dawn came on this day of peace and goodwill
But the song and the dance stayed there in the air
And merged in the silence with the young man's prayer.
For Christmas, as always, is shadowed by night
But we'll dance and we'll sing till we bring it to light.

The anonymous birder — *How to enjoy village birdlife*

Little rowdy redbreast

OUR national bird, our favourite bird, our Christmas bird. However, our cute and diminutive garden friend has some unusual features and may not be quite as it is portrayed. It was originally known as a ruddock (meaning red) or a robinet. Even though it's breast is an orangey red, the colour orange didn't exist in English language until the fruit made its appearance in the 1600s. Robin became the popular name, and the non-official addition of redbreast is said to originate from the colour of the Victorian postman's tunic. Robins have continued to be a favourite feature of festive cards for the best part of 150 years.

It has a reputation as a "friendly" bird and is very "confiding" or not minding humans, in birding circles. As we know, robins will come and visit us when digging, often performing the classic spade-handle perch.

"Oooh there's Sue out doing a bit of gardening," it chirps. "It's a nice day, I've not got a lot on, I'll go and say hello, share a few worms (although, strangely, Sue never partakes), then, by way of thanks, perch for a photo on the spade handle while she has a cup of tea."

In reality: "There is a large animal disturbing the ground, just like wild boars, pigs and cattle do. This unearths worms which I like. This animal doesn't squash or eat me either as a rule. . . . I'm going over." They will also track tunnelling moles if there are worms and other insects to be had.

It's more a relationship of convenience, but undoubtedly there is something magical about the proximity of a wild creature that the robin provides. At least we are not another robin as, to be blunt, apart from when pairing up, robins spend most of their time being apoplectically annoyed by the presence of any other robins in their territory and will, albeit rarely, fight to death to protect their patch. Slanging matches and dust-ups are regular occurrences. In spring, and therefore breeding season, it's the males doing the usual "get off my patch" posturing. In the autumn, however, the whole robin community falls out. Fights break out between any combination of males, females and fledged teenagers who have developed their adult plumage. No hanging about at home in the robin world of internecine aggression.

A village robin, looking for a fight.
photo by Dennis Brown

You may have noticed that many male and female birds have different plumage but some, including robins, have the same. Most unusual, however, is that in the autumn both males and females sing.

Also unlike most birds, robins sing all year round apart from during their post-breeding moult (see last month's edition). Singing is usually performed by male birds to attract a mate and advertise territory, but both male and female robins' watery, melancholic song in autumn and winter helps to warn off other robins from their feeding territory which they establish as single birds. They have very good low light level sight and are also stimulated to sing by artificial light also, floodlights and street lights being favourites.

The red colour of the breast as well as the song is a signal to other birds that this food patch is taken. They are very sensitive to the colour red at this time and have been known even to confront plastic red noses left in feeding grounds. If you go out walking at this time of year, you will often encounter the sudden appearance of a noisy robin on a branch. Rest assured he or she is not saying "Hello" but is totally oblivious to the fact that it is somewhat punching above its weight by wanting you out of there.

By December they are willing to call a truce for pair bonding in advance of the breeding season. The fighting gives way to courtship. The male literally changes its tune to a more cheerful refrain and the very emancipated female enters the male's territory and initiates the bonding process which consists of "tick" calls, singing and general chasing each other round the patch. Duncan Norvelle would be proud of them.

After the pair has been established they chill out together for a while then go back to their own patch with a wink and a "see you in a couple of months".

Regarding the Christmas theme, your guess is as good as mine; maybe it's the Victorian postmen? There has always been a Christian connection with the story of the redbreast being formed from the blood of Jesus.

They don't actually like snow as they feed on the ground, so put some food out in the unlikely event of a white Christmas. Maybe it is just the everyday visibility of this irrepressible small bird and it's splash of colour in the dark months, but Santa be very careful as you set off the intruder light and your red breeches disappear down the chimney.

Season's greetings. **JL**

Soggy end to season

Alvechurch amateur weatherman **Phil Thomas** records the changes.

OCTOBER continued the mild weather we had experienced in September, with very few extremes, remaining dull and cloudy.

It was a fairly wet month, with 115.3mm of rainfall, 139% of the local average. The mean temperature was 12.6C, 1.9C higher than average, making for a wet but mild month.

October remained quite cloudy and overcast with 78.4 hours of sunshine, making up only 76% of the local average; a rather dark month leading up to Halloween.

As we progressed into November, the weather continued to be rather dark and wet, following a similar pattern to October; dull but remaining mild but with lots of damp and sometimes very wet spells of weather. 33.6mm of rain fell over just three days over the 14, 15 and 16 of November causing very soggy conditions. A further 33.5mm over the 21 and 22 of the month made for a very soggy end to autumn.

With winter on the horizon, there were a few ground frosts in November, but no sign of any seasonable icy weather.

The Outlook

As *The Village* went to press there were no indications of any particularly cold weather towards Christmas, snow is less lightly based on this. However, there is still some time before Christmas, so a lot could change.

Generally a more settled pattern is favoured to continue through the first half of December, but with a chance of showers feeding into north eastern coastal areas, along the south coast and some more persistent rain to the west and southwest.

These spells of wet weather may become wintery but this risk will mostly be confined to higher ground. Temperatures are expected to sit a little below average through the start of December, particularly in the south where easterly winds will make it feel somewhat colder. So, perhaps no snow yet – but seasonably chilly weather to come.

Above: Autumn berries against an autumnal sun.
Below: Mist and cloud over the hills.

October 2022

Mean Max	16.4C	2.1C above average
Mean Min	8.7C	1.7C above average
Mean	12.6C	1.9C above average
Rainfall	115.3mm	139% of average
Sunshine	78.4hrs	76% of average

November 2022 (to the 28th)

Mean Max	12.0C	2.0C above average
Mean Min	6.8C	2.6C above average
Mean	9.4C	2.3C above average
Rainfall	133.7mm	156% of average
Sunshine	46.6hrs	71% of average

Autumn 2022

Mean Max	15.7C	1.4C above average
Mean Min	10.2C	1.6C above average
Mean	9.4C	1.5C above average
Rainfall	306.2mm	131% of average
Sunshine	188.4hrs	64% of average

More information at ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com*** You can see an improved HD weather-cam, updated at one-minute intervals, at: ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com/webcam_alvechurch.php***

WHAT'S ON GUIDE

REVIEW: *RIP VAN WINKLE AND THE SLEEPING BEAUTY*

by Paul Chamberlain with Chris Davies

A pantomime unicorn walks into a bar. The barman says: "Would you like a pint?" "No thanks," says the unicorn, "I'd rather have two halves!"

That's the way to do it! And the jokes, mischievous political jibes and madcap humour kept on coming in Alvechurch Dramatic Society's latest festive production: *Rip van Winkle and the Sleeping Beauty*.

Imaginatively co-written by Chris Davies and Paul Chamberlain, the sixth of the Society's home-grown pantos – staged at Alvechurch Village Hall from 24–26 November gleefully merged two ancient fairytales on the theme of slumber.

Despite the fearful sleeping potion, there was no risk of the audience dropping off in this sumptuously staged, Rip-roaring romp. From the opening scene, set in the competitive mayhem of a "Trickly Elves Dancing" contest in the mythical Kingdom of Nod, to the grand finale wedding, and a splendid alternative rendition of *The 12 Days of Christmas*, the swashbuckling action brought an ever-louder stream of boos, huzzahs and cheers from the gallery.

The saga of two heroes battling the malevolent intentions of wicked elf Grimm (Leah Yendell) and Princess Aurora's resentful younger sister Princess Furora (Emma-Louise Hodson) featured a range of entertaining double acts. From talking trees and numbskull courtiers to the gallant Prince Charming (Gail Rogers) and his nemesis Prince Alarming (Jo Bestwick), not forgetting the two-in-one bonus of a delightful panto unicorn, the antics even included the much-loved historic seaside duo, Punch and Judy.

Is our local Am-Dram troupe keeping the age-old tradition of community panto alive and kicking for people of all ages to enjoy? Oh yes it is!

JA

EVENTS

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Extra safety measures are in place. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

The ACOUSTIC ROOTS CHRISTMAS GIG. Friday 23 December, in the Village Hall. Starts 8pm sharp. This is their legendary Xmas party gig. Hosted by those lovable Xmas Elves The Stompies. Expect some original festive performances topped off by the Roots Xmas 'Orchestra' playing some Christmassy songs to get you in the mood! Feel free to wear a suitable Xmas hat and don't forget to bring your own egg nog or other festive drink. Still only £5. Keep Music Live.

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in the Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional outdoor sessions and a live stream for members who aren't able yet to meet indoors. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. They will be carol singing outside the Crown on 11 December, and at The Lawns on 13 December. For more information or to join or book, see their website www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. They are on holiday after 13 December till 9 January when they meet again. They will be singing at the Wassail on 4 February.

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA
Save the date of the Spring Concert, which will be on 2 April 2023.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings. They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical music along with much more. Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is an online group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. It's fortnightly and completely free – all you need is a printer and a suitable device (laptop, phone etc).

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs weekly sessions for young brass, wind, and string instrument players to enjoy being part of a group who rehearse and perform together. New members always welcome! Sessions are

continues overleaf

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run by Severn Arts at St John's Middle School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm. Individual instrumental and vocal lessons are also provided at the centre. For more info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7 pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or email r.g.henley@btinternet.com

DANCING

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/ Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Covid-dependent, so please check first by emailing alvechurchfrenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry.
They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day.
No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group!

Hopwood-based band "Riggerz" will be playing short showcase sets this December. The first show will be on Thursday 15 December at 7.30pm at Joe Joe Jim's Bar, Lickey Road, B45 8UU and Friday 16 December at 9pm at the Hopwood House Pub, B48 7AB.

Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS warmly invite everyone to the Friends Meeting House in Sandhills Road. Parking is available on site, and there is access for the disabled. We hope that this winter, rather than remaining isolated at home, you will visit us to meet old and new friends for a chat and a (free!) cup of tea or coffee. It does us all good just to get out of our homes for a short time now and then. COVID has meant that creating friendships and making social contacts has become more important to all of us, and the Meeting House is a pleasant, quiet and comfortable place where you can meet other people.
We would like to invite residents to a series of film showings this autumn and winter at Barnt Green Meeting House on Sunday 18 December at 7pm, matinee at 2pm. Admission is free, and tea, coffee and biscuits will be served. There will also be a hearing aid loop connected to a cinema sound system for those hard of hearing.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. You can now find one of these hubs in Alvechurch. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, however you may find these in many different places such as community centres or libraries, and all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood.
Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. More info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact: Charles Deverill on cdjd26@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. On Wednesday 14 December the Society will hold their Christmas Curry Night at The Weighbridge at 7pm, this event has limited tickets, and more details will follow. For more and full details, visit www.alvechurchvs.org or contact Chairperson Chris Miall via R.C.Miall@bham.ac.uk AVS is always pleased to welcome new members—contact Martin on 07742 100007 or martinclarke1@btinternet.com

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves. They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be very pleased to see you.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details: www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Sheila (0121 445 2813) or Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find general info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk and details of the local group @ContacttheElderlyRedditch on Facebook.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre, as well as via Zoom. If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heartspeakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmastersheartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

BARNT Green Parish Centre has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week.
Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

MIDLAND Ancestors have resumed monthly meetings at Bromsgrove Methodist Centre (19 Stratford Road, Bromsgrove, B60 1AS). More info at: www.bromsgrovebmsgh.co.uk

LICKEY Valley Trefoil Guild, as a branch of the Guide Association, is open to anyone over the age of 18. Make new friends, travel, explore, serve the community and help Guiding and Scouting in your area. The Guild meets at Barnt Green Scout & Guide Centre (off Blackwell Road, Barnt Green, B45 8BT) every second Weds from 2-4pm. For more info call 0121 445 3907 or 0121 445 2813 or visit www.trefoilguild.co.uk

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly.
Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

THE WHEEL community room in Blackwell has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

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THE TRINITY Centre in Lickey has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 2nd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Friends Meeting House, Barnt Green. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month. There is usually a guest speaker. Meetings start at 7.45pm. Non-members are always welcome. Free entry. They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity.

Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or look on Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. Please email contact@wbdcs.org.uk for further information.

THE WEDNESDAY CLUB usually meets on the second Weds each month at Alvechurch Cricket Club at 1.30pm, and offers the chance to make new friends, meet old ones and enjoy talks, demos and visits. Info from Janet on 0121 447 7870 or Lis on 0121 445 3895.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12noon at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides regular opportunities for retired professionals and businessmen to meet socially and share common interests. A members' meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Weds each month, 10am–12noon, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. For more info visit www.bromsgroveprobus.co.uk or contact Jim on 01527 833531 bromsgrove1982probus.weebley.com

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment. They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit the website: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955. New members welcome.

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY Hall for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878.

Community Meeting Room Hire Available

ENQUIRE TODAY FOR MORE INFORMATION

BARNT GREEN QUAKER MEETING HOUSE
6 SANDHILLS ROAD
BARNT GREEN
B45 8NR

BARNTGREENMH@THEPRIORYROOMS.CO.UK

Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and the odd reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

HOPWOOD VILLAGE Hall is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Weather conditions occasionally mean that a walk must be cancelled: check with the leaders if necessary. Wear appropriate footwear. The next walk will be the "Lickey Hills Boxing Day walk" on December 26 at 10am. Led by Martin Clarke. They will meet at the Visitors Centre, Warren Lane, B45 8ER. Contact Martin on 07742100007 for more information.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties - contact: bgfcmembership@outlook.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

RELAXATION & MEDITATION for Everyone. Short, welcoming & inclusive classes with an experienced teacher at The Ark, Alvechurch, and online. An experiential approach to relaxation and meditation for a calm, clear mind and relaxed, balanced outlook. For more information, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085.

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm @Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or Facebook @ Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year.
More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318 for further details.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome.
Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @ longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

ALVECHURCH Cricket Club Pavilion is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area

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and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

PILATES Mat classes and 1:1 (apparatus). Irrespective of age, lifestyle, health and ability, we could all benefit from listening to our bodies: tuning in to our needs, building connections throughout the body, focusing on detail; challenging what is strong, building what is weaker, balancing the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Steff has 15 years' experience teaching Pilates full time. Book a 1:1 apparatus session (Barnt Green) or a mat class (Rowney Green). Call 07759 590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

COMMUNITY Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Baptist Church, run by Bromsgrove council: Active Seniors on Tues 9.30–10.30am. and Zumba Gold on Thurs 1–2pm (each £3.50 per session). Fully-qualified, insured instructors on hand to help. For more info, call 01527 881289 or visit at www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/things-to-do/active-bromsgrove

YOGA for Every-Body. Friendly & Inclusive classes in Blackwell, Alvechurch and online with an experienced teacher. A slow but powerful approach to yoga, which encourages free, natural alignment of the body, whilst building strength, flexibility and relaxed awareness. Contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903663085.

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966 069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

WOODRUSH MINIS AND JUNIORS

Is your child in year 4 or 5 and has shown an interest in rugby?

If so, then Woodrush rugby is looking for boys and girls in these year groups to join them. All are welcome to come along to help build their u9's and u10's team.

Sessions on Sunday mornings 10-11am. Please contact Tom or Kris on 07875328090 or 07783670140. Icknield Street, Birmingham, B38 0EL.

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 8 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

EVERY SCOUT GROUP in Bromsgrove (which includes Barnt Green, Blackwell, Catshill, Finstall and Lickey as well as the town centre) currently has girls and boys aged 6-18 waiting to join, their numbers restricted by the ratio of adults to young people. A few more adults helping would enable existing leaders to open more Beaver, Cub, Scout and Explorer units allowing more young people to experience Scouting and learn skills for life. If you could spare a few hours each month please contact us on 07539 031740 or visit scoutshw.org.uk

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

ROWNEY GREEN PRE-SCHOOL offers learning through play for children from two years to school age, Tues–Thurs 9am–2pm, term-time only. Call 07522 926286 or see Facebook.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Follow them on social media for more information or visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

FINSTALL Pre-school in Finstall Village Hall, Mon–Thur 9.15am–1pm (term-time only). Led by a qualified teacher. Visits welcome. Call 07903 560787 or email Finstallpreschool@hotmail.com

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG. Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

GAMES & COMPETITIONS

SHIRLEY & WYTHALL CHESS CLUB meets at Wythall Community Association in Silver Street, Wythall, B47 6LZ, every Thurs from 7.30pm. The club has four teams playing in competitive leagues. Friendly atmosphere. New players are most welcome, just turn up or contact Barry Knee on 01564 826250

SPADESBOURNE Bridge Club plays at Amphlett Hall, Crown Close, Bromsgrove B61 8DW. Join the group for friendly bridge in a pleasant venue on Thurs evenings, 7pm for a 7.15 start. They aim to finish by 10pm. Table money for visitors is £3. Details from Jan on 01905 772256.

MONDAY Bridge Club at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House would like to welcome a few new members – for more info contact the organiser, Des Clarke, on 0121 453 3034.

FRIDAY Bridge Club meets at Burcot Village Hall every Friday evening. We play friendly, competitive Bridge in comfortable surrounds. We meet at 18:45 for a prompt start at 19:00. Refreshments are provided free of charge. For full details please contact the Secretary Ed Payne on 07950951122 or visit www.bridgewebs.com/friday

BROMSGROVE Bridge Club plays every Tuesday evening from 7.25 to 10.30pm at The Court Leet (a Hungry Horse Pub) 174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, B61 7AY. We are very friendly and welcome guests or potential new members, with or without a partner. The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union and the Worcestershire Contract Bridge Association. Contact the Secretary, Sally Flood, on 01527 832468 or sallyflood@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE Board Gamers is a friendly group which meets at 7.30pm each Weds at the Ladybird Inn, Aston Fields. More info on Facebook 'Bromsgrove Board Gamers'.

BARNT Green Duplicate Bridge Club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall each Weds afternoon and would like new members – contact Liz on 07538 092296.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so. They like to read to local audiences and some write "poetry on request". For more information, contact mail@marygreen.plus.com

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

COMMON THREAD: Bring your knitting, crochet, patchwork, sewing etc. All are welcome. Friendly help and chat. Meets on the last Saturday of each month (apart from Christmas Day, of course!) in The Wheel at St. Catherine's, Blackwell B60 1BN. Please bring your own drink to stay covid safe. Further information from Angela Bevan 0121 477 9924.

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroft-arts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the last Tues of the month from 2pm–3.30pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide HQ in Blackwell Road, Barnt Green. Tuesday morning and Tuesday afternoon sessions. Workshops with visiting tutors during each term. There is a waiting list, but enquiries from improvers and intermediate artists welcomed. Jackie: 0121 445 4745.

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY usually meet at The Village Hall on the second Thursday each month at 7.15pm. There will be no meeting in December as we feel this is a very busy period for people, so the Committee would like to wish all its members and readers of The Village a very Merry Christmas and a very Healthy New Year.
On January 12 2023 we welcome Phil Smith to speak again. His topic is "Nuts about Narcissus". Phil is always an excellent speaker and we are sure this talk will be most enjoyable. Guests are always welcome £3.50 include coffee and biscuits. For more information please telephone Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

ROWNEY GREEN FLOWER CLUB, held at the Hall: You don't have to be a flower arranger to enjoy the friendly company of our members, while watching beautiful flowers being transformed into an amazing arrangement. For more info contact Felicity on 07812 336263

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month except in December when it was the 2nd Thursday. No meeting in January. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 0121 445 1915.

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com. You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

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HELP & ADVICE

POPPIES' is a monthly bereavement support group — contact Rev Sheri Gidney on 0121 445 1185 for details.

DIVORCED/separated and having trouble seeing your children? Being excluded from their lives? The ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED PARENTING has been helping mums and dads in the family court system and problems over contact and residence for over 20 years. Visit www.associationforsharedparenting.org.uk

REPAIR CAFE is for those looking to save their money and fix broken or faulty household items. The Repair Cafe is part of an international network that keeps faulty appliances and clothes out of landfill and offers 'a cuppa' and a slice of cake to visitors while they wait. Visit the Repair Shop on the first Saturday of every month 2-5pm at All Saints Hall, Burcot Lane, B60 1AD. For more info: 07804251731 or repaircafebromsgrove@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY hosts one-to-one Computer Sessions for people wanting to learn the basics. If you need help with emails or advice on surfing online then pop in to arrange for free tuition, provided by volunteers. They can also help with online applications for Blue Badges and bus passes. For more info call The Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

GUIDE DOGS are looking for volunteers who could give a few hours of their time to help someone locally and living with sight loss, get out and about. Volunteer sighted guides support the person they are partnered with to feel part of the community. No previous experience is necessary, full training will be provided and the role is extremely flexible! For more information email MidlandsMSG@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcross-wi.wordpress.com or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7.00pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7.30pm on the second Tues every month at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence on 01527 822611 or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Mariea Clarke clarke.mariea@gmail.com or alvechurchpres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

FINSTALL & COFTON HACKETT WI meets on the first Monday of the month at Finstall Village Hall at 2pm. For more info call President Val Wheeler on 01527 874518.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 4th Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susan-barratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, Whetty Lane, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Anyone can just drop in on either night. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

Words by Mike Sharpe

The Rousler features Dambusters hero

THE latest edition of *The Bromsgrove Rousler*, the local history magazine published by the Bromsgrove Society, is now available. The 2022 edition – number 37 in the series – features personalities and events that have helped shape Bromsgrove's history.

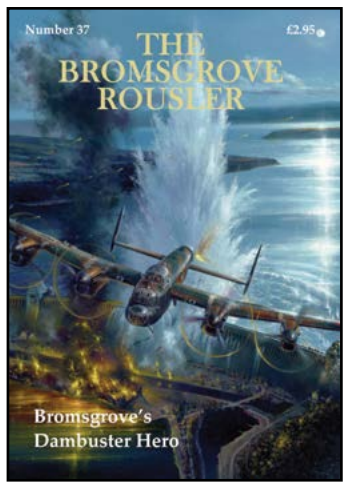
The cover story, by Sandra Mason, highlights a local man's contribution to one of the most remarkable missions of the Second World War.

Flight Sergeant Bill Townsend, who lived in Marlbrook, was the pilot in one of the 19 Lancaster bombers involved in the Dambusters raid in 1943.

The night of 16-17 May 2023 will mark the 80th anniversary of the raid, which struck at the heart of Germany's wartime industry in the Ruhr Valley. Bill was awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal for his efforts that night. His contribution has received little recognition locally, a situation the Bromsgrove Society hopes to rectify by erecting a memorial plaque.

Other articles include memories of an earlier time recalled by Harry Shinner, Pam Harrison remembers life from a different era, and reviews of three local history books on the area, including the Bromsgrove Society's own "Bromsgrove: The Story of a Market Town".

■ **The Society is selling this edition of the Rousler postage-free via its website www.bsoc.co.uk and on social media @bromsgrovesoc. It is also available, for £2.95, from a wide range of retail and other outlets across the district.**



Shadow of the Dam: by award-winning artist Simon W. Atack based on detailed aerial photographs.

Why your support matters

IN the heart of Alvechurch you'll find the non-profit community cafe, The Lounge, which has been at the centre of many village fundraising and awareness projects for the work they do to support the community.

All proceeds made by the cafe go back into their community projects, which allow them to operate.

As another year comes to a close, The Lounge is reflecting on the year they have had. Rachel Rollinson, Community and Youth Engagement Co-ordinator said: "We want to thank everyone for the amazing support from our wonderful community."

The support The Lounge receives has provided funding and support for community projects including:

FRIENDSHIP MATTERS: A weekly group for seniors, who have enjoyed seated exercise, activities such as Tai Chi, a visit from Alzheimer's Research UK, memory games, arts and crafts and musical sessions with Midland Sinfonia and Tony's musical bingo.

In September a fantastic time was had on the trip to the Black Country museum, thanks to support from Bromsgrove District Council, Equality Small Grants Scheme.

This group has also been supported by funding from the Co-op Local Community Fund and The Big Lottery Scheme (read more about the Co-op Local Community Fund earlier in the magazine).

YOUTH @THE LOUNGE: The Lounge has run four weekly and fully subscribed youth sessions, which have included stressboxing, a relax kids session and bowling. They have run Easter and summer Blackwell Adventure trips and the youth took part in The Lounge Lock Challenge; completing the largest lock flight in the country with the support of Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society.

The group were over the moon to win best charity scarecrow with their magical Harry Potter display.

Last January The Lounge secured two years of funding from Cornerstones, which has allowed them to increase their youth provision.

COMMUNITY EVENTS running throughout the year such as the Easter Trail, Love your Community, a stall at Picnic in the Park, the Scarecrow Festival and providing food and refreshments for the Christmas lights switch-on.

THE COMMUNITY CAFE which has continued to provide a warm and welcoming space for all ages to meet during the week.

Their menu prices have not increased since May 2021, offering great value meals, freshly ground coffee and homemade bakes.

This year, The Lounge cafe ran an "Acts of Kindness Campaign", where villagers could nominate an unsung hero who deserved recognition. The Lounge then arranged for a treats to be delivered to them. The Lounge also had a special delivery post-box, where children were able to post their Christmas letter, which was collected by Santa's elves so Santa could write a reply. Santa also dropped into the Lounge on Sunday 4 December to enjoy breakfast with families.

Rachel wanted to thank the community on behalf of The Lounge: "All of this would not be possible without our wonderful staff, volunteer team, the trustees and the support of many local businesses, as well as you our loyal and valued supporters and customers.

"So a huge thank you, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year."

■ **The Lounge is currently recruiting for additional volunteers to join the team. If you could spare a few hours and would like to know more get in touch at: manager@alvechurchlounge.org.uk**

Live music: Friendship Matters enjoys a performance by Anna and Shulah from The Midlands Sinfonia in The Lounge.

Magical: Youth @ The Lounge's winning scarecrow.

Scaling up: The youth group on a climbing adventure.

A dream come true

Trevor Ball celebrates a month of football he and many other villagers will never forget.

What an amazing time to be part of the Alvechurch FC family. I have supported the club home and away since the 1984/85 season, when The Church were playing at Lye Meadow against my hometown side, RS Southampton. There were four of us supporting Southampton including myself and my wife, but from that day I was hooked.

In that time I have seen many ups and downs, promotions, relegations, cup wins and, unfortunately, the club going into administration – but nothing could equal the events over the past couple of months.

The journey started in the first qualifying round away to fellow southern premier side Mickleover and it looked as though our cup dreams were over at the first hurdle after falling two goals behind only to fight back to win 3-2 with super-sub Danny Waldron scoring a brace.

A comprehensive 4-0 victory in the second round of qualifying against Harborough Town followed with another Danny Waldron brace and two for Leo Brown, lining up another home tie against high flying Nuneaton Borough who had beaten us 3-1 in the league the previous Tuesday.

On this occasion Alvechurch came out on top with another 4-0 cup victory, and only a difficult home cup tie against Worksop Town stood in the way of the club reaching the first round of the FA Cup since 1973/74 season. Alvechurch were cruising at 3-0 up with five minutes to play but two late Worksop goals made the final minutes unnecessarily tense before the relief around the ground on the referee's final whistle – we had done it . . . first round of the FA Cup!

Immediately the club was buzzing, BBC were broadcasting the draw live from Lye Meadow, with club president Alan Smith making the draw and interviews with manager Ian Long, captain Jamie Willets and goal scorer from the Worksop match Tom Edge

Eventually the third from last ball was drawn: Alvechurch away at League 1 side Cheltenham Town.

This saw 1,500 supporters decked out with new replica shirts, scarves and bobble hats headed down the M5, including 18 coaches, to experience a day of their lives. Alvechurch fans old and new descended on Whaddon Road and sang our way through 90 minutes and the away end erupted when Danny Waldron put The Church ahead and then stood in disbelief as he scored his second as the non-league side from four leagues and 92 places below our hosts reached the second round with a 2-1 win.

All eyes were on the draw the following Monday direct from Wrexham. Captain Jamie Willets and director Mark Foggarty made the journey and were interviewed promoting the club before we were drawn away to Forest Green Rovers, another League 1 side from Gloucestershire and home of ex Alvechurch hero Josh March.

Then the news came through Alvechurch were going to be shown live on BBC1, 3pm Saturday afternoon.

The smaller allocation of tickets were soon snapped up and once again the convoy of coaches headed south . . . but unfortunately this is where the dream ended.

A contentious penalty saw us go one down but a Jed Abbey wonder strike of a free kick equalised before Josh March headed the winner for Forest Green.

If we had won we would have been drawn at home to Birmingham City.

As I said, what an amazing time to be a Church fan, from going two goals behind in the first qualifying round to being screened live on BBC with the whole country watching. Sometimes dreams do come true.

PRESENTATION: Alvechurch supporter Jay Chalcott hands over £3,000 to the Alvechurch Arrows U10s (left) and manager Jason Grove (right), raised by the lucky dip football cards draw he organises at his local pub, The Crown, at Withybed Green.

Jay started the cards draw around 40 years ago to support local youth football teams, in particular Alvechurch youth section, with half the money raised from each draw going towards the youth teams.

He has raised more than £25,000 over the years with the support of regular visitors to The Crown.

Above: Alvechurch players try to catch Danny Waldron as he celebrates scoring in the famous victory at Cheltenham. *Picture/*Ian Macvie

AFC FIXTURES

League matches unless stated.

DECEMBER

3rd	Rushden & Diamonds (a)	12.30
6th	Stratford Town (h)	7.45
10th	Stourbridge (a)	1.00
17th	Ilkeston Town (h)	3.00
26th	Redditch United (h)	1.00

JANUARY

2nd	Tamworth (a)	3.00
7th	Barwell (h)	3.00
10th	Redditch United (a) (WFA Senior Cup)	7.45
14th	Basford United (a)	3.00
17th	Coalville Town (h)	7.45
21st	Royston Town (h)	3.00
24th	St Ives Town (a)	7.45
28th	Hednesford Town (a)	3.00
31st	Needham Market (a)	7.45

The long climb begins after double cup exits

As both of Alvechurch FC's big FA competition glory hunts came to an end, the team has turned its attention to climbing back up the league.

The deep runs in both the FA Cup and FA Trophy left The Church third from the foot of the Premier Southern Central league – but with seven games in hand over leaders Tamworth.

And straight away they bounced back from the previous Saturday's FA Cup disappointment at Forest Green with a 0-2 away win at struggling Rushden and Diamonds to begin the rise with a solid performance.

The team's confidence should be sky high after the heroics of the autumn, particularly reaching the second round of the FA Cup.

Around 1,100 Church fans made the trek into Gloucestershire for this historic tie and, but for the restricted ticket allocation, might even have outnumbered the 1,600 or so Forest Green supporters. Perhaps the League 1 side's fans had decided to stay at home and watch it on the BBC?

The excitement around our Worcestershire villages was huge. For Alvechurch, having already come back from a road trip with a Gloucestershire Football League Club's scalp at Cheltenham, why not a second time?

As many will have seen on the television coverage, the tone of the game turned on a soft penalty decision against The Church, which left them chasing the game.

The start of the second half saw Alvechurch scream back into contention as a Jed Abbey free kick arced into the top corner of the Forest Green goal.

But, perhaps inevitably, it was former Alvechurch fan favourite Josh March who was to break their hearts two minutes later, squirming a spinning ball along the ground just past the fingers of keeper Dan Jezeph and into the goal.

Even seeing their opponents cut to ten men with 18 minutes on the clock wasn't enough to give Alvechurch an opening as everything they tried fizzled out and the game ended 2-1.

But no one should forget that almost 650 clubs failed to get this far in the competition and it was a second ever appearance in the FA Cup Round Two, and a second ever league scalp, taken at Cheltenham Town in the previous round.

Meanwhile, in the FA Trophy tie away against Suffolk side Leiston, Alvechurch almost came back to get a result after falling three goals behind in the first 37 minutes.

But a hat-trick by Danny Waldron proved fruitless as Leiston scored a stoppage time winner to deny The Church a chance of reaching the next round.

Hello, Harry

THE CLUB has welcomed attacking midfielder Harry Bower to Lye Meadow. Harry came on as a second half substitute in the FA cup tie away at Forest Green, having joined on loan from Macclesfield.

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